



Qualification Specification



Qualification summary

Qualification title	NCFE CACHE Level 3 Technical Specialist in Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in Early Years Settings (Award)
Ofqual qualification number (QN)	610/4001/0
Guided learning hours (GLH)	24
Total qualification time (TQT)	44
Minimum age	16
Qualification purpose	This qualification is designed to meet the needs of both 16 to 19 and adult learners who are interested in developing additional specialist competence in an educational occupation. It clearly aligns to Skills England's hierarchy of purpose. The qualification offers an engaging course of study and provides learners with the opportunity to specialise within an occupational area. The qualification will enable learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to develop additional specialist competence within education and early years. Furthermore, employers will be able to access reliable evidence of a learner's achievement against the criteria, which are the minimum requirements for practice in a specialised role within the occupational area, as a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO).
Grading	Achieved/not yet achieved
Assessment method	Internally assessed and externally quality assured via a portfolio of evidence.
Work/industry placement experience	Work/industry placement experience is preferred but not required.
Occupational standards	This qualification builds on the outcomes within the Early Years Educator occupational standard (ST0135). The specialist duties have been written to build upon the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the Early Years Educator standard. 1. demonstrate a clear understanding of diversity and equality for effective inclusive practice, which values and respects children's social and cultural context, to include high-ability children as well as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and English as an additional language (EAL) 2. ensure all practitioners in the setting understand their responsibility to children with SEND and the setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEND needs. Support the development of the team by mentoring, role modelling values and behaviours, and managing change effectively through purposeful supervision 3. apply knowledge of child development proactively, working in partnership with key stakeholders in children's lives to improve



	outcomes for babies and children. Ensure parents/carers are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting 4. liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting 5. continually develop own practice 6. facilitate child-centred, self-directed, high-quality learning environments conducive to rich play opportunities
UCAS	Please refer to the UCAS website for further details of points allocation and the most up-to-date information.
Regulation information	This is a regulated qualification. The regulated number for this qualification is 610/4001/0.
Funding	This qualification may be eligible for funding. For further guidance on funding, please contact your local funding provider.



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Section 1: introduction

Centres must ensure they are using the most recent version of the Qualification Specification on the NCFE website.

Aims and objectives

This qualification aims to:

- focus on the study of special educational needs in the early years sector
- incorporate a key core of knowledge

The objectives of this qualification are to:

- explore the roles and responsibilities of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) in an early years setting
- understand the strategies and techniques for supporting children and their families
- increase knowledge of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) codes of practice

Support Handbook

This Qualification Specification must be used alongside the mandatory Support Handbook, which can be found on the NCFE website. This contains additional supporting information to help with planning, delivery and assessment.

This Qualification Specification contains all the qualification-specific information you will need that is not covered in the Support Handbook.

Guidance for entry and registration

This qualification is designed for learners who envisage or currently have careers in such areas as healthcare, social work, nursing, counselling, early years and teaching. This qualification builds on the outcomes within the Early Years Educator occupational standard (ST0135).

It may also be useful to learners studying qualifications in the following areas:

- teaching and learning
- early years education
- special educational needs

Registration is at the discretion of the centre in accordance with equality legislation and should be made on the NCFE Portal.

Learners must be aged 16 or above to undertake this qualification and have experience of working with babies and young children before registering. Learners may find it helpful if they have already achieved a level 2 qualification.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that all learners are capable of achieving the learning outcomes (LOs) and complying with the relevant literacy, numeracy, and health and safety requirements.



Learners registered on this qualification should not undertake another qualification at the same level, or with the same/a similar title, as duplication of learning may affect funding eligibility.

Achieving this qualification

To be awarded this qualification, learners are required to successfully achieve **both mandatory units**.

Please refer to the list of units in appendix A or the unit summaries in section 2 for further information.

To achieve this qualification, learners must successfully demonstrate their achievement of all LOs of the units as detailed in this Qualification Specification. A partial certificate may be requested for learners who do not achieve the full qualification but have achieved at least one whole unit; partial achievement certificate fees can be found in the Fees and Pricing document on the NCFE website.

Age range covered by the qualification

This qualification relates to working with children in early years settings, between the ages of birth to 5 for early years educators.

Progression

Learners who achieve this qualification could progress to the following:

- employment:
 - early years SENCO
- further education:
 - special educational needs
 - early years education
 - teaching and learning
- higher education

Progression to higher-level studies

Level 3 qualifications can support progression to higher-level study, which requires knowledge and skills different from those gained at levels 1 and 2. Level 3 qualifications enable learners to:

- apply factual, procedural and theoretical subject knowledge
- use relevant knowledge and methods to address complex, non-routine problems
- interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas
- understand the nature of the area of study or work
- demonstrate an awareness of different perspectives and approaches
- identify, select and use appropriate cognitive and practical skills
- use appropriate research to inform actions
- review and evaluate the effectiveness of their own methods

Resource requirements

There are no mandatory resource requirements for this qualification, but centres must ensure learners have access to suitable resources to enable them to cover all the appropriate LOs.



Work/industry placement experience

Work/industry placement is preferred but not required.

Realistic work environment (RWE) requirement/recommendation

The assessment of competence-based criteria should ideally be conducted within the workplace. However, in instances where this is not feasible, learners can be assessed in a realistic work environment (RWE) designed to replicate real work settings.

It is essential for organisations utilising an RWE to ensure it accurately reflects current and authentic work environments. By doing so, employers can be confident that competence demonstrated by a learner in an RWE will be translated into successful performance in employment.

In establishing an RWE, the following factors should be considered.

The work situation being represented is relevant to the competence requirements being assessed:

- the work situation should closely resemble the relevant setting
- equipment and resources that replicate the work situation must be current and available for use to ensure that assessment requirements can be met
- time constraints, resource access and information availability should mirror real conditions

The learner's work activities reflect those found in the work environment being represented, for example:

- interaction with colleagues and others should reflect expected communication approaches
- tasks performed must be completed to an acceptable timescale
- learners must be able to achieve a realistic volume of work as would be expected in the work situation being represented
- learners operate professionally with clear understanding of their work activities and responsibilities
- feedback from colleagues and others (for example customers, service users) is maintained and acted upon
- account must be taken of any legislation, regulations or standard procedures that would be followed in the workplace

How the qualification is assessed

Assessment is the process of measuring a learner's skill, knowledge and understanding against the standards set in a qualification.

This qualification is internally assessed and externally quality assured.

The assessment consists of one component:

- an internally assessed portfolio of evidence, which is assessed by centre staff and externally quality assured by NCFE (internal quality assurance must still be completed by the centre as usual)



Learners must be successful in this component to gain the Level 3 Technical Specialist in Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in Early Years Settings (Award).

Learners who are not successful can resubmit work within the registration period; however, a charge may apply in cases where additional external quality assurance visits are required.

Unless otherwise stated in this specification, all learners taking this qualification must be assessed in English and all assessment evidence presented for external quality assurance must be in English.

Internal assessment

We have created some sample tasks for the two internally assessed units, which can be found within a separate document in the member's area of the NCFE website. These tasks are not mandatory. You can contextualise these tasks to suit the needs of your learners to help them build up their portfolio of evidence. The tasks have been designed to cover some LOs for two units and provide opportunities for stretch and challenge. For further information about contextualising the tasks, please contact the Provider Development team.

Each learner must create a portfolio of evidence generated from appropriate assessment tasks to demonstrate achievement of all the LOs associated with each unit. The assessment tasks should allow the learner to respond to a real-life situation that they may face when in employment. On completion of each unit, learners must declare that the work produced is their own and the assessor must countersign this.

If a centre needs to create their own internal assessment tasks, there are five essential elements in the production of successful centre-based assessment tasks; these are:

- ensuring the assessment tasks are meaningful with clear, assessable outcomes
- appropriate coverage of the content, LOs or assessment criteria (AC)
- ensuring that safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion are considered in their task design
- having a valid and engaging context or scenario
- including sufficient opportunities for stretch and challenge for higher attainers

It is expected that centre-devised tasks are reviewed by the centre and are comparable to both industry standards and standardised across centres. This will reduce predictability.

Assessment guidance is provided for each unit. Assessors can use other methods of assessment as long as they are valid and reliable and maintain the integrity of the assessment and of the standards required of this qualification.

Group and collaborative working

Where group working can be helpful for manageability, learner output and assessment **must** still be carried out on an individual basis. There is no scope for **group assessment** within qualifications.

Learners can collaborate to research / carry out preparatory work. Each learner must write up their own account of the task, using their own words; for example, this could be in the form of a self-reflection. Learners will be individually assessed against the criteria.



A centre can observe learners as a group, but each learner is required to have their own evidence in terms of what they produced for the task. An individual observation record should also be completed for each learner to clearly show what the learner did in the assessment and how they performed.

Where group tasks are appropriate, centres should make it clear how the groups are to be formed and give learners some autonomy in the formation of those groups where practical. If a cohort has an insufficient number of learners, then cohorts can be formed using mixed groups of learners or the role of learners can be performed by other appropriate adults.

Measures to ensure sufficient individual evidence is generated for assessment purposes:

- AC being evidenced are clear for each individual within the group
- clear role definition from the outset to align with the evidence required by each learner for the task
- encouraging the use of journals or logs to record progress and monitor contributions across the group
- training group members on carrying out fair and valid self and peer assessment
- use of peer assessment and self-assessment to evaluate their own and others' contributions
- ensuring appropriate supervision by the assessor

The assessor/quality assurer will need to be able to see how **each** learner being assessed has contributed and met the LOs.



Section 2: unit content and assessment guidance

This section provides details of the structure and content of this qualification.

The types of evidence listed are for guidance purposes only. Within learners' portfolios, other types of evidence are acceptable if all learning outcomes (LOs) are covered, and if the evidence generated can be internally and externally quality assured. For approval of methods of internal assessment other than portfolio building, please contact your external quality assurer (EQA).

The explanation of terms explains how the terms used in the unit content are applied to this qualification. This can be found in section 3.



Unit 01 Roles and responsibilities of the special educational needs co-ordinator in the early years (R/651/1074)



Unit summary			
The aim of this unit is to explore the role of statutory guidance and how this informs the role and responsibilities of the special educational needs co-ordinator in an early years setting.			
Assessment			
This unit is internally assessed and externally quality assured via a portfolio of evidence.			
Mandatory	Achieved/not yet achieved	Level 3	12 GLH

Learning outcomes (LOs) The learner will:	Assessment criteria (AC) The learner can:
1. Understand the principles, statutory guidance and legislation underpinning practice for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in an early years setting	1.1 Explain the term special educational needs and disability in relation to statutory guidance
	1.2 Outline the requirements of the SEND code of practice for an early years setting in line with statutory requirements
2. Understand the role of the early years special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)	2.1 Understand the role of the early years special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)
	2.2 Explain the responsibilities of the early years SENCO to share best practice and raise confidence of colleagues in their work with children with SEND
3. Understand partnership working for the early years SENCO	3.1 Explore services available for children and their families through the local offer
	3.2 Describe the support available from other professionals, agencies and services to support the early years SENCO
	3.3 Explain the role of the early years SENCO during transition
	3.4 Explain how information sharing with others within and beyond the setting contributes to effective transition and supports achievement of agreed outcomes
4. Understand early identification and action for children with SEND	4.1 Use examples to describe each of the areas of need identified below: • communication and interaction • cognition and learning • social, emotional and mental health difficulties • sensory and/or physical needs
	4.2 Explain how high and low incidence of SEND are identified
	4.3 Describe characteristics of different types of SEND in an early years setting to include: • high incidence • low incidence
	4.4 Summarise processes for identification and early action for children with SEND in an early years setting in accordance with the early years foundation stage



Learning outcomes (LOs) The learner will:	Assessment criteria (AC) The learner can:
	4.5 Give examples of adjustment strategies and interventions for supporting the learning of children with different types of SEND to ensure positive learning outcomes

Range
2. Understand the role of the early years special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)
2.1 Role: The role of the SENCO in private, voluntary and independent early years settings to include: - ensuring all early years practitioners in the setting understand their responsibilities to children with SEND - ensuring all early years practitioners are familiar with the setting's approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children with SEND - ensuring parents/carers are closely involved throughout and that their insights inform action taken by the setting - liaising with professionals and/or agencies beyond the setting - engaging with the child to gain their view 2.2 Best practice: The learner must consider: - induction of new staff - staff responsibilities to children with SEND - setting approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children with SEND - partnership working towards agreed outcomes with parents/carers and in consultation with the child - identifying training needs and how these can be met - accessing sources of support to promote SENCO role - role modelling, mentoring, supervising and managing change
3. Understand partnership working for the early years SENCO
3.1 Local offer including the provision of the local authority of all services available to support children who are disabled or who have SEND and their families. 3.2 Other professionals, agencies and services: Where appropriate, learners should apply their own skills to liaise with other professionals, agencies and services beyond the setting, such as: - sensory support services - specialist teachers - speech and language therapist - occupational therapist - physiotherapist - Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS) - local voluntary agencies who provide support to families



Range

- social care services
- area SENCO inclusion officer or equivalent, where available

3.4 Information sharing:

The learner must consider:

- what information can and/or should be shared with others
- how to share information with the receiving setting or school
- how to involve children and their parents/carers in this process

Delivery and assessment guidance

LO1 During the teaching of this learning outcome learners must be able to explain legal obligations that early years providers share towards disabled children.

LO4 (AC4.1) When describing each of the broad areas, examples of associated difficulties must be included.



Unit 02 Strategies and techniques for supporting children and families (T/651/1075)

Unit summary			
The aim of this unit is for the learner to consider strategies and techniques for supporting children and their families with special educational needs and disability in early years settings.			
Assessment			
This unit is internally assessed and externally quality assured via a portfolio of evidence.			
Mandatory	Achieved/not yet achieved	Level 3	12 GLH

Learning outcomes (LOs) The learner will:	Assessment criteria (AC) The learner can:
1. Understand the graduated approach in an early years setting	1.1 Describe each stage in the graduated approach cycle
	1.2 Outline how following a graduated approach provides SEND support in the early years
	1.3 Discuss ways of engaging with parents/carers, colleagues and other professionals throughout the graduated approach
	1.4 Discuss benefits to the child of parent/carer participation throughout the graduated approach
	1.5 Analyse the reviewing processes for progress monitoring and action planning to inform practice within the graduated approach
2. Understand English as an additional language (EAL)	2.1 Explain the needs of children with EAL in an early years setting
	2.2 Explain the needs of children with EAL and SEND in the early years
3. Understand education, health and care (EHC) plans	3.1 Describe the principles underpinning EHC plans
	3.2 Analyse clear goal setting for effective EHC plans
	3.3 Explain record keeping for best practice in tracking progress for children in line with the early years foundation stage and local authority requirements
4. Be able to practice as a reflective early years practitioner	4.1 Develop a skills gap analysis against the early years SENCO job description
	4.2 Reflect on own practice to identify professional development opportunities, training and support needs for early years SENCO role
	4.3 Explore funding implications in relation to SEND for the early years SENCO

Range
1. Understand the graduated approach in an early years setting
1.1 Graduated approach cycle:
• assess • plan • do • review



Range

1.3 Colleagues:

Must include key worker and practitioner colleagues, and their role within the cycle.

1.4 Benefits to include:

- confidence and wellbeing
- improved social skills
- holistic condition improvement

Delivery and assessment guidance

LO1 (AC1.1) The learners must consider the purpose and value of observation and how these observations inform each stage. Consider methods and the appropriateness of observation.

LO2 The learners should be able to discriminate rate and pace with regard to EAL and SEND, as well as being able to identify when SEND is occurring, not related to EAL.

LO3 Teaching around EHC plans must include any support plans generated to enhance the holistic health, development and learning of individual children.

Facilitate child-centred, self-directed, high-quality learning environments conducive to inclusive rich play opportunities linked to the [early years foundation stage statutory framework](#).



NCFE assessment strategy

The key requirements of the assessment strategies or principles that relate to units in this qualification are summarised below.

The centre must ensure that individuals undertaking assessor or quality assurer roles within the centre conform to the assessment requirements for the unit they are assessing or quality assuring.

Knowledge LOs

- assessors will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make assessment decisions
- internal quality assurers (IQAs) will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make quality assurance decisions

Competence/skills LOs

- assessors will need to be both occupationally competent and qualified to make assessment decisions
- IQAs will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make quality assurance decisions

The centre with whom the learners are registered will be responsible for making all assessment decisions. Assessors must be **contracted** to work directly with the centre, contributing to all aspects of standardisation. The centre must ensure a process of training is followed, including during induction and quality assurance activities. Occupationally competent and qualified assessors from the centre must use direct observation to assess practical skills-based outcomes.

For this qualification, the centre must use the further information relating to adult care, childcare and health assessment principles, which can be found within the mandatory Support Handbook.



Section 3: explanation of terms

This table explains how the terms used at **level 3** in the unit content are applied to this qualification (not all verbs are used in this qualification).

Analyse	Break down the subject into separate parts and examine each part. Show how the main ideas are related and why they are important. Reference to current research or theory may support the analysis.
Apply	Explain how existing knowledge can be linked to new or different situations in practice.
Clarify	Explain the information in a clear, concise way.
Classify	Organise according to specific criteria.
Collate	Collect and present information arranged in sequential or logical order.
Compare	Examine the subjects in detail and consider the similarities and differences.
Critically compare	This is a development of 'compare' where the learner considers the positive aspects and limitations of the subject.
Consider	Think carefully and write about a problem, action or decision.
Create	Make or produce an artefact as required.
Demonstrate	Show an understanding by describing, explaining or illustrating using examples.
Describe	Write about the subject giving detailed information in a logical way.
Develop (a plan/idea)	Expand a plan or idea by adding more detail and/or depth of information.
Diagnose	Identify the cause based on valid evidence.
Differentiate	Identify the differences between two or more things.
Discuss	Write a detailed account giving a range of views or opinions.
Distinguish	Explain the difference between two or more items, resources, pieces of information.
Draw conclusions	Make a final decision or judgement based on reasons.
Estimate	Form an approximate opinion or judgement using previous knowledge or considering other information.



Evaluate	Examine strengths and weaknesses, arguments for and against and/or similarities and differences. Judge the evidence from the different perspectives and make a valid conclusion or reasoned judgement. Reference to current research or theory may support the evaluation.
Explain	Provide detailed information about the subject with reasons showing how or why. Responses could include examples to support these reasons.
Extrapolate	Use existing knowledge to predict possible outcomes that might be outside the norm.
Identify	Recognise and name the main points accurately. (Some description may also be necessary to gain higher marks when using compensatory marking).
Implement	Explain how to put an idea or plan into action.
Interpret	Explain the meaning of something.
Judge	Form an opinion or make a decision.
Justify	Give a satisfactory explanation for actions or decisions.
Perform	Carry out a task or process to meet the requirements of the question.
Plan	Think about and organise information in a logical way using an appropriate format.
Provide	Identify and give relevant and detailed information in relation to the subject.
Reflect	Learners should consider their actions, experiences or learning and the implications of this for their practice and/or professional development.
Review and revise	Look back over the subject and make corrections or changes.
Select	Make an informed choice for a specific purpose.
Show	Supply evidence to demonstrate accurate knowledge and understanding.
State	Give the main points clearly in sentences or paragraphs.
Summarise	Give the main ideas or facts in a concise way.
Test	Complete a series of checks utilising a set procedure.



Section 4: support

Support materials

The following support materials are available to assist with the delivery of this qualification and are available on the NCFE website:

- Sample Assessment Materials
- Qualification Factsheet

Other support materials

The resources and materials used in the delivery of this qualification must be age-appropriate and due consideration should be given to the wellbeing and safeguarding of learners in line with your institute's safeguarding policy when developing or selecting delivery materials.

Products to support the delivery of this qualification may be available. For more information about these resources and how to access them, please visit the NCFE website.

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Contact us

NCFE
Q6
Quorum Park
Benton Lane
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE12 8BT

Tel: 0191 239 8000*
Fax: 0191 239 8001
Email: customersupport@ncfe.org.uk
Website: www.ncfe.org.uk

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Appendix A: units

To simplify cross-referencing assessments and quality assurance, we have used a sequential numbering system in this document for each unit.



Knowledge-only units are indicated by a star. If a unit is not marked with a star, it is a skills unit or contains a mix of knowledge and skills.

Mandatory units



Unit number	Regulated unit number	Unit title	Level	GLH
Unit 01	R/651/1074	Roles and responsibilities of the special educational needs co-ordinator in the early years	3	12
Unit 02	T/651/1075	Strategies and techniques for supporting children and families	3	12

The units above may be available as stand-alone unit programmes. Please visit the NCFE website for further information.



Change history record

Version	Publication date	Description of change
v1.0	August 2025	First publication
v1.1	November 2025	- Information added to 'Internal assessment' section around consideration for safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion - Additional section added: 'Group and collaborative working'